

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, APRIL 19, 1897.

THE PRICE OF WHEAT.

The Toronto Mail and Empire editorially says: "Farmers and grain buyers of Manitoba will not find it easy to forget or to forgive Laurier's free trade programme. In consequence of it they have had to write off about \$2,000,000 from the value of their wheat. By so much has the anticipation of free trade made them poorer. The Mail goes on to say that Manitoba mill owners were paying high prices, in some cases a dollar a bushel for Manitoba wheat, until the Liberal party began to talk of free trade, when the flour men thought it time to call in their buyers and shut down operations. When they took that step the price of wheat rapidly waned. One of the largest flour mill companies stated it stopped buying because it was apprehensive of the duty on flour being removed. The free trade talk of Laurier and his braves has simply scared the price of wheat down 25 cents a bushel."

This paragraph from the Mail and Empire is of course very far-fetched. According to the Toronto paper, the wheat markets of the world are controlled by the fiscal policy of Canada. This is the only inference which can be drawn from the article, and a very dull intellect it would be indeed which would not comprehend the absurdity of such a contention. Viewed in this light the Mail's article is very stupid.

It is not necessary to so grossly exaggerate matters to point an argument. It is quite true that the milling trade in Canada has suffered severely on account of tariff uncertainty, and this, combined with unfavorable market conditions, has made the present season an unprofitable one for millers.

Manitoba millers are placed in a somewhat peculiar position. In Manitoba the wheat crop is marketed within two or three months in the fall and early winter, or at least the great bulk of it. The millers do not buy the wheat until it is coming, they would run short of supplies before the season was half over. The millers are therefore obliged to buy their supplies for the year while the rush of wheat deliveries is on in the fall and early winter. Thus they are obliged to carry almost a year's supply on hand.

This season the market has been very unfavorable for the millers. In the early part of the season there was a bull fever on and prices were high. This occurred during the season of heavy deliveries in Manitoba. After the great bulk of the crop had been purchased, prices began to decline, and the wheat now held by the Manitoba millers and it represents an enormous loss to the millers. The situation has been further depressed by the possibilities of a reduction of duty on flour, and altogether the lot of a Canadian, and particularly the Manitoba miller, has not been a happy one this season.

It would certainly be very unfair to Can-

adian millers to make a reduction in the duty on flour, in the face of the present circumstances. Our millers are now loaded up with dear wheat, and they could not compete with United States millers, who would be operating with wheat which had cost them about twenty cents per bushel less than the raw material held by our millers. If any change is to be made in the wheat and flour duties, they should be arranged so as not to come into force until a new crop is ready for the market, and then our millers would be prepared to buy their wheat at relatively the same prices as were paid in the United States. The price of wheat in Manitoba during the busy marketing season, ruled relatively several cents per bushel higher than prices paid south of the boundary. With free trade in wheat and flour no such difference could exist, as with competition open with the United States the price of wheat here would have to be held down to a level with prices in the United States.

PROTECTING CHILDREN.

Hon. Mr. Mowat has introduced a bill in the Senate at Ottawa regulating the employment of children in factories. The bill says that no boy under twelve or girl under fourteen shall be employed in a factory. Provision is made that boys under sixteen and eighteen may be prohibited from working in factories where the work may be considered dangerous or unwholesome. No child (meaning a boy under fourteen or a girl under sixteen) shall be employed in a factory before eight in the morning, or after six in the evening, with one full hour for meals. Provision is made for the appointment of inspectors and for the punishment of offenders. These provisions are no doubt good so far as they go. The main objection we see is, that they do not go far enough. The question naturally arises: Why should these restrictions apply only to factories? Many stores and offices where children are employed, are quite as unhealthy places for children as the average factory. As a rule the hours of labor in shops and offices are longer than in factories. This being the case, it would seem even more necessary to protect children from being over-worked in stores and offices than in factories. In the case of factories, organized labor is at work to restrict the employment of children. This, however, does not alter the principle. By all means let us have the children protected, not by a half-way measure, but by a law which will apply to all kinds of employment. The principle of protecting children in this respect is sound, and the application of the principle should be general, and not partial.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF PROTECTION.

Protection takes various forms. In free trade Great Britain there has been a strong tendency of late in favor of protective legislation. Not protection as we understand it in Canada, but nevertheless very much the same thing in respect to the object sought to be attained. One of these protective measures is the law placing restrictions upon the importation of live stock. Another one is

the bill now before the Imperial parliament to prevent the sale of imported meats, etc., as home products. British free traders who would regard with horror any attempt to protect home interests by means of customs duties, are not above employing other forms of protection, by means of thinly-disguised measures, nominally aimed at something else.

In Canada we have had protection of the same sort. The principle opposition to the removal of the live stock quarantine regulations, was on the ground that it would enable United States shippers to send their stock into Canada, in competition with the home industry. The regulations were regarded more in the light of a protective measure of a commercial nature, rather than as a preventative against the introduction of disease. Now we have a demand emanating from the Ontario Fruit Growers' association, for the exclusion of California fruit, on the alleged ground that there is danger of the introduction of fruit diseases. The Ontario fruit growers have to put up with sharp competition from the California fruits, and no doubt it is this competition, rather than the fear of disease, that is troubling them.

The prohibition of the importation of Pacific coast fruit, would be a most serious matter for Manitoba and the Territories. We import enormous quantities of fruit, in proportion to population, and with the exception of apples and some kinds of grapes, nearly everything comes from the United States, principally from the Pacific coast.

Ontario fruit growers are not able to supply this market, except with apples and some kinds of grapes. Plums, peaches, and other soft fruits sent here from Ontario, do not arrive in a marketable condition as a rule. In fact the attempts to bring in soft fruits from the eastern provinces have resulted in failure. British Columbia is so far not able to supply any considerable portion of the demand for fruits from Manitoba and the Territories.

One of the chief things that this western prairie country requires is fresh fruits, and our interest lies chiefly in the latter direction, rather than to give any countenance to a measure intended to increase the cost of fruit here.

WILD LANDS.

The idea seems to prevail in some sections of Manitoba, that the owners of wild or unoccupied lands are fit subjects for plunder. This belief was illustrated by a remark made in the Manitoba legislature, shortly before the close of the recent session. A member said: "He favored the imposition of a wild land tax over and above school taxes and municipal taxes. This, he believed, would compel the owners to sell the land at such prices that there would be some to buy, or they would be compelled to keep a certain amount of land under cultivation. In the country towns and villages the people were practically a unit in their desire to have such a law." This is certainly a very unreasonable proposition. Vacant lands are already taxed to the full extent of improved and occupied farms, so that the municipal